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Publication date:
2014

Document Version
Accepted author manuscript, peer reviewed version

[Link to publication from Aalborg University](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Jensen, M. M. (2014). *Localisedness as a predictor of salience*. Abstract from Perceptual linguistic salience: modelling causes and consequences, Freiburg, Germany. <http://www.frias.uni-freiburg.de/en/events/current-events/perceptual-linguistic-salience-modelling-causes-and-consequences>

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Localisedness as a predictor of salience

While salience can be (and has been) defined in many different ways and from many different perspectives, predictors of salience seems to be a common theme.

Within the sociolinguistic field, Trudgill (1986) and Kerswill and Williams (2002) are possibly some of the most cited works. Kerswill and Williams suggest that salience (in their definition) is ultimately caused by social factors. This raises further questions, though, such as: which social factors are involved in salience? Why and how are linguistic forms and social meanings linked? And how does this affect language perception and processing? Taking a socio-cognitive approach to language study can help us merge the insights from sociolinguistics with those from cognitive linguistics and perceptual psychology to perhaps bring us closer to a few answers.

Research into Tyneside English (Jensen 2013) suggests that the perception of the localisedness of a feature might be a likely social factor in the salience of morphosyntactic forms. Similar results are reported for Liverpool English (Scouse) phonology in Honeybone and Watson (2013).

The Tyneside study consisted of three empirical studies: a corpus study (based on the NECTE corpus patterning frequency of use over time), a questionnaire study (investigating participants' awareness of features) and a popular dialect literature study (which linked the two other studies).

Among the 12 variables investigated (pronouns, sentential negation, verbal morphology), in particular the unique local variables *divn't*, *wor*, *telt*, and *hoy* proved particularly salient to the questionnaire participants. Suggestions for the interpretation of these patterns include social indexicality (Silverstein 2003, Johnstone 2009) and enregisterment (Agha 2003, Beal 2009) to account for how the variables come to carry social meaning in the local community and exemplar theory (Pierrehumbert 2001; Hay, Warren and Drager 2006) to account for how the link between the social and the cognitive aspects of language might be combined in the mind. Overall, the results of the three studies indicated that social factors such as perceptions of uniqueness and indexical value in the form of localness influence the level of salience of forms.

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